Essential Belief Statement

Melody S. Tinkham

University of Maine at Farmington

EDU 583

Teaching was never a profession on my radar while I was growing up. I have always had a love for reading and looked forward to my English classes, but for some reason I just never thought about it. It wasn’t until my senior English teacher told me I should think about it that I actually stopped and considered the job. Somehow I think she knew I would love establishing bonds with my own students some day, the same way I enjoyed having those bonds with my own teachers in high school. This would become the real driving force behind my goal to become a teacher, even though I didn’t really know how special that bond could be until my student teaching. Seeing my mentor teacher’s rapport with her students and seeing the chemistry a class could have and the bond a good teacher makes with his/her students…that’s when I was hooked! I’m so thankful for the inspiration given to me by both of those women. Without them I wouldn’t have known how rewarding being a teacher is.

Even though I’m only going into my seventh year of teaching, I’ve been lucky to experience multiple grade levels and teach a variety of different students. Having had experience in both the middle school and high school settings, I can definitely say my place is at the high school. I thoroughly enjoy older students who are beginning to make serious decisions about their future and who are really coming into their own as individuals. My position gives me the opportunity to enjoy their growth as young adults, but to also truly immerse myself in my content area a lot of the time and share that with students. My 10th, 11th, and 12th graders are excited enough about learning that they make my job fun and keep me working hard to always challenge them in new and interesting ways. Not only do my students make me love my job, but also my department at Mt. Blue High School is an amazingly supportive environment to work in. The English department is open-minded, helpful, trustworthy, energetic, up to speed with technology and teaching strategies, and most importantly is always making it about students. I understand that I’m a young teacher and still loads to learn and experience, but I’ve definitely found my little place in this world with my position in the English department at Mt. Blue High School.

Collaboration and team teaching is something I need to spend more time doing, but the little I’ve done was truly beneficial. My second year of teaching, I was placed on a tenth grade team with a math teacher and science teacher. The three of us shared the same students and spent the year working together on various lessons as well as just creating a supportive team atmosphere for students in their second year of high school. I’ve never seen a team model used in a high school setting, but at Lewiston High School where I was currently teaching they’d found great success with it with freshman, so the model moved to the 10th grade year as well. While the experience had plenty of bumps in the road, teaming was valuable for me and for my students and I would definitely try it again if given the chance. I always look forward to finding new and interesting ways to work with my colleagues and learn what I can from them.

Before leaving Lewiston High School to come to Mt. Blue, I was on the Senior Capstone Committee. The teachers involved worked with students to create a Senior Capstone project that students would follow and build on throughout their four years in order to know their growth of knowledge and understanding of various subjects. Being part of this committee was a great leadership opportunity that I had to unfortunately say goodbye to when I changed jobs. However, I’ve learned how great it feels to be part of the decision making surrounding student learning and I’m looking forward to getting involved somehow in a leadership role at Mt. Blue. Some day I’ve really like to run an extra curricular club for kids similar to a civil rights team, a journalism club or something that hasn’t been thought of yet. I also look forward to sharing the responsibility of being a class advisor for four years with another colleague. These are all goals I have for myself, but I have yet to put it all into action just yet.

Looking at my learning style inventory results tells a lot about what kind of person I am. I enjoy my solitude and frequently need to be alone to work information out in my head. However, I am also incredibly social and enjoy working with others. I consider myself easy to get along with as well as willing to play both a supportive or leadership driven role when needed. I learn by doing and benefit from being able to work with my hands when I can. I’m very visual also enjoy talking through my ideas before I have to decide on an answer. Knowing my own strengths helps me to keep in mind that my students are all different learners. My strategies need to evolve and change constantly so that I’m reaching as many students and their learning styles as I can.

The Mt. Blue School District (RSU 9) has a unified mission statement that says we are “committed to providing a safe, nurturing, and accepting environment where students can explore and develop their creative and intellectual abilities. We shall educate students, promote their self-esteem, and encourage them to achieve their maximum potential. Students will demonstrate the ability to solve problems and to be self directed life-long learners. As productive members of our society students will demonstrate compassion and ethical judgment.” This mission statement plays a huge role in my classroom. I work hard each year to make my classroom a “safe, nurturing, and accepting environment”. This in particular is something I was lucky to experience in many of my own high school classes and that is why I enjoyed learning so much. I want students to feel that same feeling of acceptance and safety that I felt in my English classes. Even if all students do not enjoy English as a subject, at least the environment I’ve created for them is one that allows them to be who they are. They are free to express themselves as long as they also know how to respect others around them.

I’m looking forward to this course as I look forward to any class or professional development opportunity I get. I’m looking forward to growing as an educator and learning new strategies that will improve my teaching. Learning from my fellow cohort members as well as my professors is always beneficial and eye opening. The thought of collaborating with another colleague is exciting and I’m probably looking forward to that the most out of all of the items on the agenda. Bottom line is: I love what I do and I’m hoping to do it for a long time. The more I can learn about doing it to the best of my ability the better. Bring it on!